Strategic coalition voting: Evidence from New Zealand

Shaun Bowler [a,1], Jeffrey A. Karp [b,*], Todd Donovan [c,2]

[a] Department of Political Science, University of California, Riverside, CA 92521, USA
[b] Department of Politics, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4RJ, UK
[c] Department of Political Science, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225-9082, USA

ABSTRACT

Whereas the classic literature on strategic voting has focused on the dilemma faced by voters who prefer a candidate for whom they expect has little chance of winning a seat, we consider the dilemma faced by voters in PR systems who do not expect their preferred party to be in government. We develop hypotheses relating to strategic voting over multi-party governments that we test using the New Zealand Election Study (NZES) campaign study of 2002. We find evidence that expectations play a role in structuring vote choice. While there is clear evidence of wishful thinking there is also evidence that voters respond to expectations about government formation. These expectations may mobilize voters and lead them to defect from their first preference.

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1. Introduction

A considerable literature exists on the capacity and willingness of voters to engage in strategic or tactical voting.[3] Under some conditions a voter may be willing to vote for her second preferred candidate over her most preferred, but less viable, candidate in order to bring about the defeat of a least preferred candidate. Generally speaking empirical tests and applications of this decision making process have been examined in the UK and Canada, both of which have single member plurality systems. As Hobolt and Karp's (2010) review indicates, a far smaller literature exists, however, on the possibility of strategic voting in PR systems over coalition governments.[4] In this paper we examine the possibility for strategic voting over coalition formation in New Zealand.

We begin with a review of the (small) existing literature on this topic, then we develop hypotheses relating to strategic voting over multi-party governments that we test using the New Zealand Election Study (NZES) campaign study of 2002. Whereas the classic literature on strategic voting has focused on the dilemma faced by voters who prefer a candidate for whom they expect has little chance of winning a seat, we consider the dilemma faced by voters in PR systems who do not expect their preferred party to be in government. While there is clear evidence of wishful thinking there is also evidence that voters respond to expectations about government formation. These expectations may mobilize voters and lead them to defect from their first preference.

2. Literature review

Cox (1997) makes a strong and persuasive case for the existence of strategic voting in PR systems that will shape the number of parties that a system will carry. For Cox, a PR system will produce $M + 1$ lists (where M is the district magnitude) as voters shy away from non-viable parties. But the electoral success of parties gaining entry into the legislature is just part of the scope for strategic voting in PR systems, another — and just as consequential — opportunity for strategic behaviour comes in deciding to vote over

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[3] In this paper we use the terms strategic and tactical interchangeably as is the practice in this literature.

[4] Examples of some of the recent attempts to look at this systematically include Bargsted and Kedar (2009), Blais et al. (2004, 2006).

governments. That is, voters under PR can, in principle, make the same kinds of decisions they make in districts races in Canada and the UK in order to help (or hinder) the formation of governments. Voters would like to encourage the formation of governments to their liking, but sometimes the party they prefer has little chance of winning a place in government. Voters could, therefore, desert a preferred party that had little chance of forming a government in hopes of improving the chances of second preferred party being a member of the governing coalition. Indeed Austen-Smith and Banks (1988) would seem to go further than Cox when they note; "In a multi-party election with proportional representation, in which individuals cast at most one vote, sincere voting is typically not rational" (p. 407). The term insincerity here means that voters under PR will cast a vote to promote a policy outcome rather than a party platform, and that policy outcome will be the consequence of coalition bargaining.

The theoretical framework, then, is well established and is a quite straightforward extension of the more extensive literature on tactical voting in the simpler cases of Canada and the UK (see Blais et al., 2009 for review). The question we address in this paper is an empirical one: can we find evidence of such behaviour in a multi-party system where coalition governments are to be expected? If so, what would evidence of strategic behaviour look like?

A key component in strategic voting is that of the capacity of voters to form expectations (see Blais and Bodet, 2006). In this instance the relevant expectations are over which parties will comprise members of the government which can be predictable (Armstrong and Duch, 2010). In some multi-party systems it is easier than others for voters to hold accurate expectations over which government is likely to form. For example, the existence of pre-election pacts (Golder, 2005, 2006) makes it easier for voters to assess which parties will ally should they win the election. Sometimes this is straightforward. In Australia, the Liberals and National – while distinct parties – have always joined together when in government as have Germany's CDU and CSU.[5] Sometimes the current ruling coalition may be expected to re-form after any election. Relatively persistent arrangements such as Netherland's "purple" coalition or Italy's *pentopartito* may exist as guides to voters even when they are not underpinned (as they sometimes are) by formal announcements In these examples voters may be able to develop quite clear ideas over which parties will form the government.

Voters may well have clear expectations over who will win but they may not necessarily be accurate ones.[6] In districted systems this is often cast in terms of who will win

the seat since government formation is tied to the number of seats won (Bowler and Lanoue, 1992). But since, in PR systems, electoral success is not a sufficient condition to ensure a place in government this complicates the formation of expectations by voters. To be sure, even under PR parties have to win some seats to have a chance of entering government. But pre- and post-election bargaining among party elites can produce governments that are not entirely connected to electoral results: parties can, for example, lose votes at an election yet retain or even attain a place in government (see Laver and Schofield, 1998). Pre-election pacts make some of this kind of bargaining easier for voters to see and understand. Nevertheless, the formation of voter expectations becomes a question in and of itself since – unlike districted systems – it is not enough for voters simply to pay attention to poll results – they also have to pay attention to elite bargaining.

The conditions for voters to accurately cast a strategic ballot in coalition settings are thus quite difficult to come by. It may be quite easy to make mistaken forecasts over which party will be in power simply because voters either do not have useful information about the elite bargaining game or, as part of that bargaining game, elites are spreading disinformation or otherwise concealing the true state of the game in order to gain advantage. What this, in turn, means for the voters is that they may be very wary of making mistakes and – hence – be quite reluctant to cast a strategic vote.

What factors help shape whether voters can form expectations? Presumably factors that assess awareness (media use, education and interest in politics) are drivers in the formation of expectations that are more accurate than others. But a hypothesis of projection effects would suggest that – rather than responding to hard information – voters have optimistic expectations based on their level of commitment to a given party.

Of course, even after voters do form expectations about the chances of parties that could form a government then the question remains whether voters will respond to those expectations. One hypothesis – and the major one of concern in this project - is that voters would like to use their vote to encourage the formation of governments that will adopt policies they (the voters) prefer. Under some circumstance their most preferred party will have little chance of being part of a government – either because that party will not win many votes or because elite bargaining looks to exclude that party. In such circumstances voters may well switch to a second preferred party that has a better chance of helping the government.[7]

Alternative explanations may be drawn from the familiar literature on psychological attachments and vote choice. Party identification and attachments will generally limit the willingness of voters to cast a strategic vote. What makes these kinds of factors likely to be more important as determinants of vote choice and, further, makes the hypothesis of strategic behaviour less likely to hold is the complexity of the

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[5] Although the claim that these are two separate parties seems somewhat harder to sustain.

[6] It could be argued that voter expectations about the possible outcomes of both the election game and the bargaining game need not be accurate. That is, voters may well develop mistaken expectations and vote accordingly. In the literature on economics and voting this would be broadly analogous to seeing voters cast a ballot on the basis of perceptions of economic performance rather than economic performance itself. While it may therefore be the case that accurate expectations are not necessary to voters casting a strategic ballot it is important to establish the question of whether voters do, in fact, have accurate expectations.

[7] One possibility we do not consider here but is considered by Blais et al. (2004: p. 70) is the process in which voters may desert a strong party to help a smaller one over a vote threshold. Supporters of Germany's CDU have sometimes been urged to do this in order to help the FDP.

decision at hand. That is, it may be that it is simply too difficult for voters to form reasonable expectations of which party or parties will form the government. Because of this difficulty it will be too hard for voters to be able to vote strategically and their behaviour will, therefore, be driven by the stalwart of models of mass behaviour—partisanship.

But the impact of expectations may not be restricted to vote choice alone: other attitudes and behaviours may also be impacted by expectations concerning the likely success or failure of a preferred party gaining power. It may be the case, for example, that voters who realize that their preferred party has little chance of forming a government may decide not to vote while supporters may be more motivated to show their support and participate. This is analogous to a bandwagon effect which helps winners while the reverse process of spiralling disengagement hurts losers. On the other hand, if a voter dislikes a party that is expected to win, an instrumental voter may be more motivated to turn out and vote either to defeat the least preferred party or at least deprive it of a vote. Another possibility is that a lack of competition may have the reverse effect of depressing turnout. When the outcome is clear, parties and candidates will have less of an incentive to mobilize voters and citizens are less likely to believe to feel their vote will be decisive (Karp and Banducci, 2008). In short, expectations about government formation may also affect the likelihood of an individual going to the polls.

3. The New Zealand case

The choice of New Zealand is driven in large part by availability of appropriate data from multi-party systems. Of all multi-party systems that have extant public opinion surveys, the New Zealand Election Study (NZES) is one of the few such surveys that asks voters a number of key questions about expectations that we rely on below. In previous work only a handful of studies has — to our knowledge — been examined in this way.[8] The NZES includes a pre-election survey based on a rolling cross-section design where about 90 respondents are randomly selected on a daily basis over the duration of the campaign which lasts for five weeks. In 2002, the NZES included a battery of questions asking respondents to assess the chances that parties would be in government after the election. These questions allow us to measure how voters' expectations about government formation might influence voting intentions. Moreover, the survey design provides greater leverage because expectations are likely to change over the course of the campaign.

Given the importance of policy preferences to coalition formation (Laver and Schofield, 1998) the policy positions of likely partners are important. Fig. 1 illustrates how the parties are distributed across the ideological spectrum. The estimates are based on the average voter's perception of the location of each of the parties on a left right scale measured

after the election.[9] The two largest parties, Labour and National, which have dominated New Zealand elections for much of the past century, are located on the left and right respectively. Act, a liberal party advocating lower taxes and privatization is perceived as being to the right of the National party while the Alliance and the Greens are to the left of Labour. Progressive Coalition represents a newly formed party led by Jim Anderton who had previously been the party leader for the Alliance but had left the party in early 2002 after internal divisions led to its collapse. He was joined by five other Alliance MPs who formed "Jim Anderton's Progressive Coalition". Both New Zealand First, a populist party that had held the balance of power following the 1996 election and United Future are widely perceived as being centrist parties.

Aside from data availability, the 2002 election provides an appropriate political context to test our hypotheses about strategic voting over coalition governments. The election was called three months early by the Labour party, which had been polling well ahead of National, the largest party on the centre right. Labour had governed since 1999 with the Alliance, a conglomerate originally made up of five minor parties located to the left of Labour. As mentioned above, a collapse of support for the Alliance together with internal divisions led to its breakup in early 2002. Labour dominated the campaign and the only speculation was whether it had sufficient support to govern on its own. Support for Labour weakened somewhat over the campaign, while support for the smaller parties was characterized by a great deal of volatility.[10] This contributed to increasing uncertainty about who would form the next coalition government. A post-election survey revealed that 61 percent of the voters claimed to have made up their mind sometime during the campaign. This is the highest figure recorded at any New Zealand election for which data exists (Vowles et al., 2004, p. 38).

Early in the campaign, the Greens experienced an increase in support but their support fell somewhat (along with Labour's) following a controversy over genetic modification (GM). Support for some of the other smaller parties, notably New Zealand First increased as the campaign entered the final weeks. United Future, a party that had been largely insignificant in the previous term with public support rarely reaching one percent surged after its leader, Peter Dunne, won a final televised debate between the leaders of the parties with representation in the House.

None of the parties in 2002 appeared to be a good fit with Labour. The Greens refusal to compromise over the

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[8] For analysis of Israeli elections see Bargsted and Kedar (2009) and Blais et al. (2006). Meffert and Gschwend (2010) examine how expectations about coalition formation influence voting behaviour in Austria. For an analysis of the Dutch case see Van Holsteyn and Irwin (2007).

[9] Supporters of the relevant party may produce estimates that are more ideologically extreme than the average voter. Averaging across all respondents has the advantage of being less biased.

[10] In 1999, Labour and the Alliance had clearly signaled their intent to form a coalition in advance of the election, avoiding the debacle that followed the 1996 election when New Zealand First, who had announced during the campaign that it would not form a coalition with National but did so anyway. After the election the process of government formation was completed in 12 days and Labour's coalition with the Alliance was not only expected by many most voters but was also the preferred option of the largest group among them (Miller and Karp, 2004).
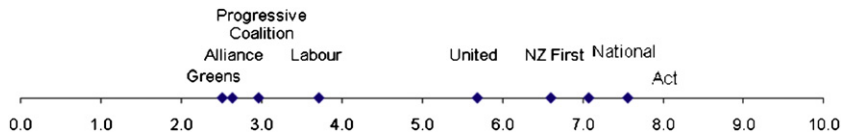
Fig. 1. Ideological placement of parties. Note: estimates are based on average placement by voters. Source: NZES 2002 post-election.

issue of genetic modification (GM) strained relations between Labour and the Greens. Labour was reluctant to deal with New Zealand First given its earlier experience in 1996, when after negotiating with Labour for eight weeks, its leader Winston Peters agreed to form a coalition with National. United Future, which had previously been insignificant was regarded as being more compatible with National than Labour. This left Jim Anderton's Progressive Coalition, a party that was barely registering in the polls. Thus for the most part, while most voters anticipated a Labour government, there was uncertainty about what type of government it would be.

As Fig. 2 reveals there was little uncertainty that Labour would be part of the next government. And voter opinions were quite clearly shared on that. The major question was whether Labour would have enough support to govern on its own or in coalition. As the campaign passed its midpoint, support for Labour fell somewhat making the prospects for a coalition government more likely. More voters expected the Greens to be in government particularly as the campaign entered the final two weeks. At the same time, more voters began to see New Zealand First, Jim Anderton's Progressive Coalition, and United as other viable options. Towards the end of the election campaign, therefore, the prospects for some kind of coalition government improved and there were at least four parties that were seen as potential partners to Labour.

During the campaign, voters were asked a series of questions about what parties they most preferred in government and which parties they expected to be in government. One question asked voters to name the party they would most like to see in government. To reduce the tendency to name large parties or project expectations on preferences, the question explicitly asked voters to name a party regardless of the number of seats they expected that party to win. While nearly everyone expected Labour to lead the government, the percentage who believed that their preferred party was going to have a place in government was somewhat higher for all of the parties than the electorate in general. For example, nearly two thirds of those who preferred the Greens expected that party to be in government compared to about 40 percent of the total electorate. While these figures provide evidence of wishful thinking the absence of a strong relationship between expectations and government preference does suggest that some citizens had more realistic expectations.

Of course, in evaluating parties not everything need be based on spatial assessments or issue distance: parties may be evaluated on other terms as well (Karp and Banducci, 2002). That is, parties may be close to a voter but may not be seen as competent or honest or have a terribly appealing leader and New Zealand data show that evaluations of parties is not entirely driven by spatial (issue distance) concerns. Overall, voters appeared to be more skeptical of all of the smaller parties whether they are centrist or not. As Fig. 3 reveals, responses to a thermometer scale ranging from zero to ten indicate that between 20 and 30% of citizens rank the small parties at the two lowest categories. In comparison, fewer voters tend to hold negative evaluations of the two large parties. Just four percent held negative evaluations of Labour compared to seven percent for National.

For strategic voting to exist, there must be a gap between voter preference and choice. As the data in Table 1
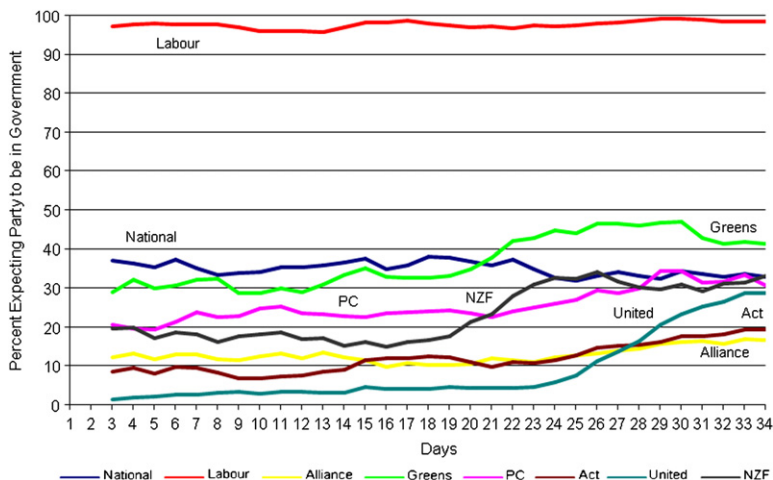

Fig. 2. Expectations of parties forming the next government (2002). Note: five day moving averages.
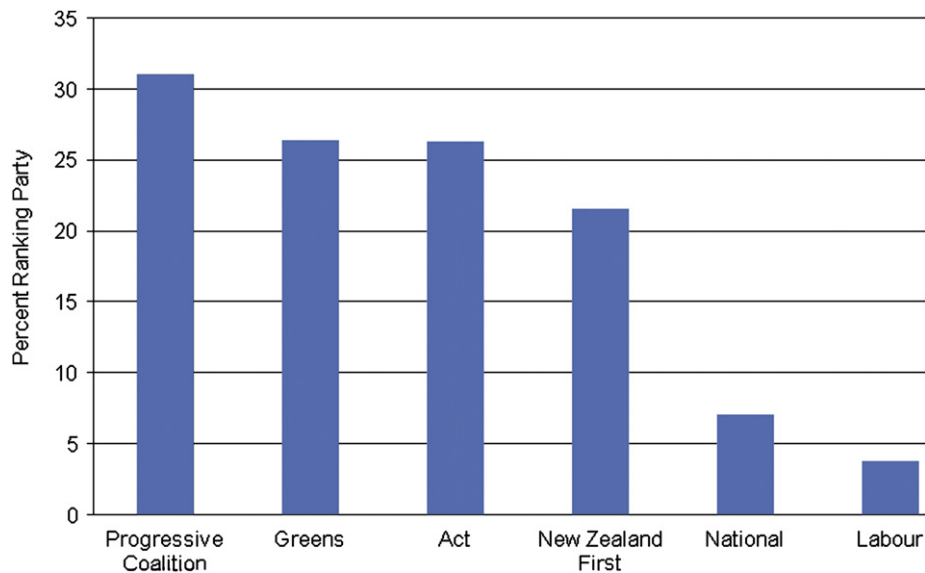
Fig. 3. Most disliked parties. Note: classification is on based on ranking parties on a scale from 0 (strongly dislike) to 10 (strongly like). The responses above indicate the percentage rating the party at 0 or 1 on the scale.

show, although there is a strong relationship between government preference and intended vote, it is not perfect. On average, about three quarters of the electorate intended to vote for the party they preferred most to be in government. The Greens have the highest percentage of "sincere" voting while those preferring Jim Anderton's Progressive Coalition or Christian Heritage have the lowest percentage. Defection away from National is higher than Labour which is consistent with strategic voting hypothesis. In sum, the proportion of voters who cast a vote that is inconsistent with their government preference is larger than one might predict if voters acted sincerely.

4. Measuring strategic voting

Thus far the evidence shows that voters form expectations and that their expectations are in line with aggregate opinion poll evidence (i.e. the shared expectation of Labour being in government) and, further, that there is a gap between government party preferences and vote choice. The preconditions for strategic voting are set, but do voters

really respond to the expectations of who will be in government? To address this question, we focus on two key independent variables of interest; the respondent's assessments of the chances of their most and least preferred parties gaining government (see Appendix for question wording). We expect that as respondents become more pessimistic about the prospects for their preferred party being in government they are less likely to turn out and vote (a demobilizing effect). On the other hand they may be more likely to turn out and vote if their most disliked party has a chance of gaining power. Furthermore, as both the chances of their preferred party being in power worsens and as the chance of their least preferred party being in power improves we expect to see respondents become more likely to desert their first preferred party and cast a vote for another party.

We have also included a number of control variables. Among these control variables are measures of political interest and media exposure; age, gender and a counter for days into the campaign (which we generally expect to have a positive impact on preference for coalition government

Table 1
Government party preference by intended vote.

Intended vote	Government party preference								
	Labour	National	Act	Alliance	Green	PC	NZF	United	Christian Heritage
Labour	*79.9*	3.4	4.8	5.0	7.9	21.4	5.7	3.2	5.0
National	1.7	*72.7*	8.3	10.0	1.0	7.1	6.6	3.2	10.0
Act	1.0	10.7	*79.8*						
Alliance	0.6		1.2	*80.0*					
Green	6.6	1.5	1.2	5.0	*88.1*		0.9	3.2	5.0
Progressive Coalition	1.6					*57.1*			
NZF	4.2	5.4	1.2			14.3	*82.1*	9.7	
United	1.2	2.6					0.9	*71.0*	
Christian Heritage	0.3	1.0	1.2						*65.0*
Total	54.5	27.9	3.0	0.7	3.5	0.5	3.7	1.1	0.7

Note: Italicized values indicate sincere votes.

and likelihood of voting for a second preferred party as uncertainty increases). Also included is a dummy variable for being a supporter of one of the smaller parties (i.e. all but National or Labour) which we know from the descriptive data is likely to shape affective views of the parties (see Appendix for details). One might also expect small party supporters to be less likely to engage in strategic voting over coalition governments out of concern for simply securing representation. Throughout the 2002 campaign, each of the smaller parties were polling around the 5% threshold so there was sufficient ambiguity to raise some doubt that they may not in fact secure representation.

5. Results

Table 2 presents the results of a model that predicts whether citizens intend to vote at the time they were interviewed during the campaign. The question was phrased to reduce the likelihood of over reporting by first stating that "Some people vote in elections while others choose not to". While the response categories called on the respondent to estimate the probability of voting on a scale from 10 to 0, the item has been collapsed to two categories, coded 1 for the top category, "highly likely" and 0 otherwise. To control for past behaviour, we also include a variable that is based on whether the respondent recalls voting in the previous election in 1999. This provides a more conservative test for measuring either the mobilizing or demobilizing effects unique to the campaign. Given that the dependent variable is dichotomous, we use logistic regression to estimate the results.

Contrary to our expectation of a downward spiral effect, the results suggest that citizens are not necessarily discouraged from voting even when they are sceptical about their preferred party's chances of getting into government. In addition, small party supporters are no more likely to be discouraged from voting than large party supporters. However, there does appear to be a mobilizing effect when a disliked party is perceived as having a good chance of getting into government. Specifically, when all other variables are held at their mean values, the likelihood of voting increases from 0.85 to 0.90 for those who perceive a disliked party as having a good chance of getting into government.

Other variables in the model that produce a positive and statistically significant effect include exposure to television news, strength of partisan attachments, and whether the respondent was interviewed closer to the date of the election.

The results above suggest that expectations about government formation do not discourage voters from participating. If anything, the possibility of a disliked party governing is a motivating factor. To evaluate how expectations affect voting behavior, we estimate another model where the dependent variable represents whether a citizen intends to vote for a party other than the most preferred party in government. The dependent variable, therefore, represents a defection from the preferred party which we interpret as a strategic vote. We can define a second government party preference based on a follow up question to the item measuring government party preference that asks respondents about potential coalition partners (see Appendix for question wording). Responses indicate that of those intending to vote, 15 percent named their second preference as the vote choice while 10 percent intended to vote for another party with the remaining 75 percent indicating that they would vote for their preferred party (see Table 1 for a breakdown by party). Since the dependent variable has three categories, multinomial logit (MNL) is used to estimate the model where the baseline represents voting for the preferred party.

The results in Table 3 are largely consistent with the strategic voting hypothesis. Voters who believe their preferred party has little chance of winning are more likely to vote for their second choice party. Holding all other variables constant at their mean values, the probability of casting a strategic vote increases from 0.14 to 0.17 when the preferred party is perceived as having a poor chance of winning. In addition, voters are more willing to defect when a disliked party has a good chance of winning. Specifically the probability of voting for the second choice increases from 0.14 to 0.20. Those preferring small parties, however, appear less likely than large parties to defect which is consistent with the larger risk associated with their threshold status.

Table 2
Likely voter model: logit coefficients.

	Coef.
Preferred party has little chance of being in government	−0.03 (0.25)
Disliked part(ies) have good chance of being in government	0.50*** (2.65)
Small party preferred	−0.18 (1.29)
Strength of party attachment	0.24*** (6.43)
Watched TV news/info	0.10* (1.92)
Age (in 10s)	0.10*** (2.66)
Female	0.14 (1.38)
Days into the campaign	0.01** (2.05)
Interest in politics	0.84*** (10.85)
Voted in 1999	1.68*** (13.26)
Constant	−0.77* (1.85)
Observations	3347

Absolute value of z statistics in parentheses. ***$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.05$; *$p < 0.10$.

Table 3
Vote for 2nd preferred party in government: multinomial logit model.

Likely voters	Second preference		Another preference	
	Coef.	Std. error	Coef.	Std. error
Preferred party has little chance of being in government	0.25*	(0.12)	0.21	(0.17)
Disliked part(ies) have good chance of being in government	0.35*	(0.16)	−0.20	(0.26)
Supporter of small party	−0.55**	(0.18)	0.10	(0.22)
Strength of party attachment	−0.15**	(0.04)	−0.33**	(0.06)
Watched TV news/info	0.11	(0.06)	0.03	(0.09)
Age (in 10s)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Female	−0.31**	(0.11)	−0.30	(0.16)
Days into the campaign	0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)
Constant	−0.69*	(0.34)	−0.07	(0.47)
Observations	2716			

**$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$.
Note: Reference category is first preference.

Table 4
Government preferences and intended vote: logit coefficients.

Likely voters	National		Labour		Green		New Zealand First	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Disliked part(ies) have good chance of being in government?	−0.48*	(0.19)	−0.46*	(0.22)	0.49	(0.27)	0.25	(0.26)
National government preferred	4.07**	(0.44)	−19.17	(4945.62)	−18.55	(4963.11)	−0.23	(0.66)
National government preferred × poor chance	−0.89*	(0.39)	18.26	(4945.62)	17.01	(4963.11)	0.02	(0.63)
Labour government preferred	−2.08**	(0.33)	3.73**	(0.26)	0.13	(0.29)	−0.41	(0.32)
Labour government preferred × poor chance	0.41	(0.45)	0.02	(0.18)	−0.03	(0.27)	−0.11	(0.34)
Green government preferred	−19.09	(7990.50)	0.34	(0.61)	4.27*	(0.61)	−18.03	(7871.30)
Green government preferred × poor chance	16.79	(7990.50)	−1.21	(0.76)	0.78	(0.70)	0.06	(9112.31)
NZ government preferred	0.21	(0.79)	−19.13	(9121.60)	−18.33	(9105.15)	4.94**	(0.84)
NZ First government preferred × poor chance	−0.84	(0.89)	18.72	(9121.60)	16.63	(9105.15)	−0.43	(0.84)
Strength of party attachment	−0.05	(0.05)	0.25**	(0.05)	−0.14*	(0.07)	−0.10	(0.07)
Age (in 10s)	−0.06	(0.05)	−0.07	(0.04)	−0.20**	(0.06)	0.41**	(0.06)
Female	0.39**	(0.14)	0.19	(0.12)	−0.11	(0.18)	−0.19	(0.18)
Days into the campaign	−0.02*	(0.01)	−0.02**	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)	0.02**	(0.01)
Constant	−1.32**	(0.49)	−3.45**	(0.46)	−0.89	(0.60)	−4.48**	(0.63)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.68		0.68		0.38		0.38	
n	2,846		2,846		2,846		2,846	

$**p < 0.01$; $*p < 0.05$.

To examine how expectations influenced the vote for specific parties, another model is estimated where the dependent variable represents intended vote for one of the four largest parties. For simplicity, separate logit models are estimated for each party where 1 represents the vote for that party and 0 represents a vote for another party. Our main variable of interest is the interaction between government party preference and expectations. This provides a more direct test of how expectations interact with preferences for specific parties to influence vote choice. We would expect those preferring National to be more likely to vote strategically, given the party's poor chances of being in government. While supporters of the smaller parties may also have an incentive to vote strategically, concern over their threshold status may make them less likely to defect.

The results in Table 4 confirm our expectations for National supporters. Those with a preference for National who believe their party has a poor chance of being in government are less likely to vote for National than another party. However, there is little evidence that defections from National translated into a significant advantage for any other party. There is also little evidence, however, for strategic voting for the other parties. Those hoping to see the Greens in government who had doubts about their party's prospect were not deterred from voting for that party. While the sign on the interaction term is in the expected direction for New Zealand First it is not statistically significant. In the case of Labour, those few who believed that the party would not be in government were no more or less likely to vote for Labour than another party.

6. Discussion

The literature on tactical voting is well established and well known. What is less well known is whether the lessons of that literature can be replicated in the more complex setting of coalition politics where the information demands made upon voters are, in some ways, much higher given uncertainties about coalitional games between parties. In this paper we have sought to examine

that argument in a number of ways. First, we have presented evidence from several different model specifications of vote choice. Second, we consider a wider range of attitudes and behaviours that may respond to expectations. Specifically, we consider how these expectations impact not only vote choice but the decision to vote at all.

In both ways we show that expectations about government formation have impacts on voting behaviour. Few citizens appear to be deterred from voting when they believe their party has little chance of winning. However expectations about disliked parties forming a part of the government do appear to be a mobilizing force. Although it has long been assumed that PR systems reduce or even eliminate the incentive to cast a strategic vote, some voters do respond in a way predicted by a hypothesis of tactical voting − shifting their vote choice in line with expected performance of their first and second preferred parties even after we control for attachments to the parties concerned. However strategic behaviour appears, at least in this specific case, to be confined to a subset of voters who prefer a larger party whose prospects for governing were slim. The largely one sided nature of the 2002 election in New Zealand may have reduced the potential for strategic voting. It remains to be seen whether greater party competition would increase the potential for strategic voting. If voters in PR systems do in fact consider coalition arrangements when voting, as we believe they do, then the potential for strategic voting may actually increase when there is greater ambiguity about their party's prospects for governing.

Appendix

Question wording and variable construction. Data are from 2002 NZES campaign survey. See www.nzes.org for details on the New Zealand Election Study.

Preferences

Measure of 1st preferred party is party named in response to question:

"Regardless of how many seats you expect the various parties to win, which party would you most like to be in Government?"

Measure of 2nd preferred party is party named in response to question:

"If your first choice party was unable to form a government on its own, which other party would you prefer to be its partner?"

Measure of least preferred party is party lowest in thermometer rankings of parties ranging from 0 (strongly dislike) to 1 (strongly like).

Supporter of small party (1 = intend to vote for small party, 0 = intend to vote for National or Labour).

Strength of party attachment maximum thermometer ranking for a party (max = 10).

Expectations

"Now we want to ask how likely you think it is that the various parties will be in the government after the election. Do you think the chances of [National] being in government are very good, fairly good, fairly poor, very poor, or virtually nil…".

Expected chance of 1st choice party being in government (1 = nil, poor or uncertain; 0 = good or very good).

Expected Probability of last choice party being in government (1 = nil, poor or uncertain; 0 = good or very good).

Watched television news count variable, max = 3 for number of news shows watched.

Age (in 10s).

Female (1 = yes, 0 = no).

Days into the campaign (1–36).

Interest in politics (4 = very interested; 3 = fairly interested; 2 = not very interested; 1 = not at all interested).

Voted in 1999 (1 = yes, 0 = did not).

Intention to vote

"Some people vote in elections while others choose not to. Using a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means very likely and 0 means very unlikely, and numbers in between mean varying degrees of likelihood. If an election were held today, how likely is it that you would vote?" (Likely to vote 1 = highly likely, 0 = other).

Vote choice

Taking the party vote first, if an election were held today, which party would you vote for? (1 = Voting for 2nd preferred party; 0 = no based on vote choice and response to questions about government preferences as stated above).

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